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To: Microsoft ATR
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Subject: Microsoft Antitrust Settlement comments

I think that the DOJ has let Microsoft get away with very light penalties (to put it mildly).

What is at stake for a consumer is one's _freedom to choose_, not the ability to restrict anybody's right to innovate. Most of the media coverage and even the DOJ's points, unfortunately, do not address this issue. It may not be directly the point of the antitrust case, but there is relationship here which cannot be ignored. Microsoft routinely flaunts open standards and protocols and misuses its dominant position in the desktop. Since it has lots of money, it can simply destroy any competition by buying the companies out and destroying them. Standards are there for a reason: they allow interoperability between different vendors products and ultimately drive down the costs for the consumer. If you look around many of the day to day products, like films and videotapes and electrical sockets and many other common items, the costs for consumers go down due to standardization, since companies have to compete ruthlessly to be the provider of the cheapest solution. Some standards examples from the computer and communications industry are:

- open PC architecture
- The Internet protocols (TCP/IP) and many communication standards
- Computer buses like PCI to interconnect peripherals and devices
- IEEE POSIX standards

and so on.

The same can be applied to many widely used and common computer applications like word processing and spreadsheets. If the interfaces between applications and Operating System adhere to standards, there can be many competing applications to the now dominant Microsoft Word and Excel. History shows that wherever standardization occurs, ruthless competition drives down costs. But Microsoft does not allow this to happen.

Are there examples of products where two products are very similar and offer almost the same things, but one is practically invincible from it's position? Compare Microsoft Word and WordPerfect (from Corel).

A reference to the ubiquitous Halloween documents (whose authenticity

has been publicly acknowledged by Microsoft) shows the views Microsoft has towards standards.

Now, one cannot force a company to adopt a standard, since it may believe that what it has to offer is superior. Fine. It is perfectly OK not to follow standards. It is generally true that when a company does not follow a standard, it will end up pricing the product higher than the ones compliant with the standards (e. g. some Sony products, Bose sound systems etc.) This is logical, since customer may have to pay more for the superior products.

The current situation is so bad in Microsoft's case that consumers end up paying higher for an inferior product (compared to the Linux operating system) and still feel that they don't have any choice in the matter.

It is almost evil to let injustice get away unpunished. It is unworthy of a great republic to let a situation develop where citizens are slaves to a dictator/monopoly rather than being able to choose. Each citizen can be a king only where the freedom to choose is not compromised.

-Pragnesh

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